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Working through difficult pasts: Toward thick democracy and transitional justice in education

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Grade four students in Winnipeg, Canada stand before the 'witness blanket,' on display in the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. The blanket installation commemorates the atrocities of Indian Residential Schooling, as outlined by the recent Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which the students have been learning about at school (Canadian Museum for Human Rights, 2015).

Teachers, curriculum specialists and policymakers from the Balkans travel to the Hague for a 'legacy dialogue' with the Registrar from the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, who works with them to explore how the tribunal's work could be used in schools (International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, 2017).

In Cote D'Ivoire, where transition from conflict proceeds without change in political leadership, the legitimacy of an 'official' truth commission is challenged. Youth take truth seeking into their own hands, using radio, hip hop, traditional music, poetry and dialogue to explore the violent past across identity groups (Ladisich & Rice, 2017).

Five teenagers found guilty for defacing an historic black schoolhouse in the Southern United States with swastikas receive their sentence: a history lesson. The judge orders them to read a list of classic novels that examine themes of race, conflict and injustice in the US and beyond, as well as to visit several memorial sites, then to write an essay demonstrating what they learned (Hauser, 2017).

These instances, spanning diverse contexts and engaging with distinct histories of injustice, showcase the potential for meaningful linkages between transitional justice and education, the relationship at the core of this special issue. The diversity of transitional justice, a field that has grown over the past several decades, can be seen in the above examples: internationally organized judicial trials of high level perpetrators of human rights violations; state sponsored and official truth seeking around a colonial past; locally initiated, responsive and novel memory work; and restorative and educative processes aimed at changing individual attitudes and outlooks. Also clear in these examples is the range of roles that education plays in consolidating, documenting, and strengthening transitional justice efforts. Educational content, contexts, and actors at once offer a foundation, vehicle, and outlet for transitional justice processes. It is this necessary, complex and until recently

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under researched relationship that we explore in this Special Issue.

International and comparative education researchers, policymakers, and practitioners have become increasingly committed to understanding education's role in conflict-affected contexts (e.g., Davies 2004; Mundy & Dryden-Peterson 2011). Research in this growing field has explored the relationship between education systems, state fragility, and good governance (Paulson and Shields 2014) and education's potential for contributing to democracy, peacebuilding, and reconciliation following conflict (Bellino 2015; Cole 2007; Cole & Murphy 2007; Novelli, Lopes Cardozo and Smith 2015; Paulson 2011; Worden 2014). Meanwhile, the field of transitional justice has taken shape primarily around legal and state-level instruments and reforms seeking to foster accountability and acknowledgement in the aftermath of grave violations of human rights (Palmer et al. 2012; Teitel 2000), with growing interest in less formalized or more 'local' processes, and awareness that transitional justice measures can complement, strengthen, as well as directly or inadvertently effect development (de Greiff 2009; Duthie 2008). Despite the practical and conceptual overlaps between education and transitional justice, which we outline in more detail below, scholarship about how both might contribute towards peacebuilding, reconciliation, and recovery from conflict have largely developed in isolation from one another.

We organized this special issue to further recognition that the distinct fields of comparative education and transitional justice can conceptually and practically benefit from further dialogue and collaboration. There is much to be learned by comparing how educational actors and institutions have responded to transitional justice processes, and the extent to which education has been embraced as a mechanism for advancing transitional justice goals. It is also important to consider how education as a sector has been positioned to contribute to these societal transitions, as well as the ways in which educational actors have been actively involved as stakeholders in these decisions and processes. That is, how do state-level and civil society actors envision the responsibility of schools as civic institutions to contribute to truth, memory, and transitional justice? As citizens' right to education is restored, how do conceptions of redress for historical injustice interact with educational development initiatives and everyday experiences with equity and social justice in and outside of schools? How do forms of public education, such as discourses and actions embedded in social movements, contribute to the (re)definition of civil society roles and the debates that shape and challenge them?

The empirical studies highlighted in this special issue illustrate the relevance of transitional justice to comparative and international educational scholars and practitioners. Likewise, we urge transitional justice theorists and practitioners to listen to the voices, perspectives, and experiences of educators in hopes of better understanding the challenges, opportunities, and interactions between education and transitional justice. In the following sections, we outline salient themes that emerged across the studies in this special issue and connect them to build a case for a transitional justice and education that can contribute meaningfully towards 'thick democracy' (e.g., Gandin & Apple 2011) and positive peace (Galtung 1969). We explore theoretical tensions, power dynamics and practical challenges to this relationship, while situating its importance and relevance within and beyond "conflict-affected" and "post-conflict" contexts.

What is transitional justice?

By most accounts, the groundwork for what we now call transitional justice were the Nuremberg trials following World War II (Teitel 2000). Debate and discussion around how new

governments emerging from repression and authoritarianism in Latin America and from the dissolution of the Soviet Union led to emergence of the term ‘transitional justice’ in the 1990s (Arthur 2009; Bell 2009). Under the mantle of ‘never again’ (the title of Argentina’s 1984 truth commission report), international and domestic human rights actors began actively and successfully promoting the need to reckon with human rights abuses of the past in order to secure democracy, stability, and nonviolence in the present and future (Lutz & Sikkink 2001). This, Arthur (2009, 334) explains, was different from earlier work around accounting for massive human rights violations, such as the Nuremberg trials, as it introduced a “normative aim of facilitating a transition to democracy.” By the 2000s, the term was in wide use and transitional justice began to be referred to as a ‘field’ “compromising both a sphere of practice... and a sphere of academic knowledge, with a praxis relationship between the two” (Bell 2009, 7). In 2004 the United Nations (UN) offered the following definition, now widely quoted: “transitional justice is the full range for processes and mechanisms associated with a society’s attempt to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation.”

As this UN attention suggests, “transitional justice is a field on an upwards trajectory” (McEvoy 2007, 412), now relevant to debates around democratization, state-building and human rights protection and, increasingly, a tool of post-conflict peacebuilding (Sriram 2007). States transitioning from a systematic period of human rights violations or authoritarianism have a number of formal mechanisms at their disposal as they aim to redress human rights abuses, reconstruct, and reconcile society. Consequently, there now exists a “distinguishable transitional justice template” (McEvoy 2007, 412) primarily including judicial (trials, be they international, national or hybrid) and non-judicial mechanisms (of which truth commissions are the most popular, but these can also include reparations, lustrations and other measures) undertaken ‘officially’ by or with some level of commitment from the ‘transitioning’ state’s government, with or without international support. Prominent judicial transitional justice processes include the international tribunals that prosecuted high level perpetrators in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia; hybrid models of international and national legal process, like the Special Court for Sierra Leone; domestic prosecutions, like the trial of former Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori; and the ongoing work of the International Criminal Court—itsself arguably a triumph of the power of the idea of transitional justice at a global scale (e.g., Méndez 2006). As the most popular non-judicial mechanism of transitional justice, truth commissions have now been carried out in more than 40 countries around the world (Hayner 2011) in order to clarify the ‘truth’ about a period of massive human rights abuses and, often, with the explicit mandate that this truth contribute to a wider process of reconciliation. Trials and truth commissions are not the only forms of transitional justice, and many scholars point to the promise of ‘localising’ (Shaw & Waldorf 2010) transitional justice or of promoting ‘holistic’ forms of transitional justice that better resonate with local understandings and practices (Clark 2007). Rwanda’s gacaca courts, which drew on traditional, customary practices of conflict resolution, to try suspected perpetrators of Rwanda’s 1994 genocide at community level, provide the most widely known example (Clark 2010), though gacaca has also been critiqued for its co-optation by the state (Waldorf 2010).

Defining the contours and archetypal models of transitional justice cannot help but foreshadow some of the central debates that grip the field. These include: 1) the ‘truth versus justice’ debate that dominated early scholarly discussions around the purpose and promise of transitional justice, pointing to tensions between the retributive, reparative and restorative aims of transitional justice (e.g., Kritz 1995; Méndez 1997) and which has more recently shifted to include ‘justice versus peace,’ recognizing that prosecution, amnesty and truth seeking can impede peace negotiations (e.g.,

Balasco 2013), 2) the debate around actors and scales of change, in which international templates and influence, national exercises in state-building and strengthening democracy and local processes of renegotiating relationships, memory and the social fabric are given varying levels of importance in scholarly analysis and practical priority (e.g., Shaw & Waldorf 2010; Stover & Weinstein 2004), 3) the question of whether transitional justice ‘works’ and efforts to understand, measure and evaluate its impact (e.g., Olsen, Payne, & Reiter 2010; Pham & Vinck, 2007); and 4) the critique of what exactly transitional justice is trying to achieve and for whom, or, arguments around the limitations of justice conceived as a transition to liberal democracy (e.g., Lundy & McGovern 2008; Sriram 2007). Perspectives within these debates are attached to wider theoretical commitments, which shape how scholars understand the goals, practices and outcomes of transitional justice (e.g. Bell 2009).

For some, the rise of transitional justice is best described as part of an overall ‘norm cascade’ (Finnemore & Sikkink 1998) that has installed human rights and democracy norms at an international level and domestically within most states. Offering a more nuanced model than the ‘world culture’ approach to institutionalism popular in comparative and international education studies, Finnemore and Sikkink (1998, 903) explore how states are ‘socialised’ to adopt and eventually ‘internalise’ norms such that they “achieve a ‘taken for granted’ quality that makes conformance with the norm almost automatic” (904). That Olsen, Payne and Reiter’s (2010) transitional justice database, which aimed to document all transitional justice processes between 1970 and 2007, found “transitional justice mechanism after virtually every period of repression or civil violence” (38) is evidence of the internalization of the ‘justice cascade’ norm (Sikkink 2011).

Just as critical educationalists challenge world culture theorists who explain the rise of universal education as signal of global ‘progress’ (e.g. Carney, Rapple, & Silova 2012), critical transitional justice scholars (e.g. Lambourne 2009, Sriram 2007, Turner 2007) draw attention to the power dynamics behind the rise of transitional justice as an international agenda fuelled not only by Western norms but also by Western interests. Scholars describe transitional justice as an imperial or colonial project (e.g., Turner 2007), and critique its ability to contribute towards “a ‘meaningful’ justice agenda” (Bell 2009, 6). In her consideration of transitional justice as a tool of liberal peacebuilding, Sriram (2007) shows how transitional justice is often linked to democracy and state-building in ways that conceive of democracy very narrowly and judge its success (and therefore the success of the ‘transition’ and the contribution of transitional justice to it) by the conduct of elections. Lambourne (2009) argues that transitional justice often takes place without much or any engagement from populations affected by violence and human rights violations. She makes a case for a transformative justice that is long-term and “involves identifying, understanding and including, where appropriate, the various cultural approaches to justice that coexist with the dominant western worldview and practice” (28). Here, Lambourne links transformative justice to sustainable peacebuilding, through which ‘negative peace’ (the absence of direct violence) is preserved and ‘positive peace’ (the absence of structural and cultural forms of violence, or the presence of social justice) is enabled.

From this critical scholarship emerges what we interpret as a call not just for ‘thicker’ transitional justice (McEvoy 2007), but also for a transitional justice contribution to a ‘thicker’ form of democracy (e.g. Gandin and Apple 2011). ‘Thick’ democracy depends less on the regular conduct of elections than on meaningful and equitable civic participation enabled by emancipatory transitional justice processes, which have set the groundwork for wider transformative processes social justice and sustainable peace. It is at this intersection that we locate the potential for education and transitional justice to address the legacies of difficult pasts while facing uncertain futures.

Transitional justice, education and the lens of the past: conceptualizing a relationship

At the most basic level, the goal of *never again* requires knowledge of the past and commitment to ensuring that it is not repeated. This obligation to (and of) future generations makes education essential to transitional justice. Even when transitional justice is understood narrowly as a state-level process aimed at stability and security, which may not appear to directly impact school actors, structures or interactions, education plays a significant role in what follows. We conceive of education as underpinning all transitional justice activities in formal, informal, and non-formal ways. Non-formal “outreach” activities, such as government publications or radio broadcasts, aim to inform the public about transitional justice processes and outcomes. For instance, the Special Court for Sierra Leone and the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia developed outreach strategies to inform the wider population of their work (Lambourne, 2012). Informal educational spaces, such as museums, public memorials, and monuments provide opportunities for citizens to learn about and interpret past events, while displaying the significance of past injustices to national identity constructions. Schools, as formal education institutions, are often presumed beneficiaries of transitional justice processes, and in some contexts have been sites of substantial investment as well as national and transnational collaboration geared toward curricular reform. The nature of these collaborations and engagements, however, has been widely variable across contexts, and in many cases the educational sector remains an afterthought (Ramírez-Barat & Duthie 2017).

From the perspective of transitional justice poised to contribute to thick democracy and sustainable peace, education emerges as a vital mechanism and not merely an institutional context for transmitting messages that unfold outside educational spaces in the political sphere (Bellino 2016, 2017; Murphy 2017). Equitable access to inclusive, relevant, and quality educational opportunities is central to realizing social justice in any context (Tikly & Barrett 2013) and can serve as a “barometer” of a state’s democratic commitments to citizens (Rose & Greeley 2006). There are also beliefs that “conflicts create significant and unusual opportunities to introduce changes that can, in time, and with local involvement, transform an education system” (Sommers & Buckland 2004; p. 150).

The assumption that education serves as a protective factor for young people experiencing the risks and consequences of conflict has historically dominated policy and programming. Comparative work challenges this normative assumption, examining the ways in which educational structures, content, and contexts play a role in instigating, reinforcing and escalating conflict, as well as in mitigating, resolving, and preventing it (e.g., Burde, Kapit, Wahl, Guven, & Igland Skarpeteig 2016; Davies 2007). Bush and Saltarelli’s (2000) well-cited argument that education has “two faces” illuminated the ways in which educational experiences and opportunity structures can incite violence just as often as they can contribute to peacebuilding goals. In the years since Bush and Saltarelli made this argument, issues of peace and conflict have taken on increased importance in the field of comparative and international education. Scholars and practitioners have worked to design conflict-sensitive approaches to educational reform and policy implementation (e.g., Barakat, Connolly, Hardman, and Sundaram 2013; Sigsgaard 2012). Robust fields of conflict-resolution, human rights education, and critical peace education praxis have developed in an effort to better understand the ways that school-based interactions mediate opportunities, attitudes, and actions toward peace and conflict (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos 2016; Bickmore 2004; Tibbitts 2017; Zembylas & Bekerman 2008). Calls for educational policies and practices that contribute to sustainable peacebuilding have also become codified in the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals, and thus are now the responsibility of

all states irrelevant of conflict experiences, despite that goals such as peace education and global citizenship remain underspecified and ambiguously relate to issues of justice.

While understandings of education's linkages to peace and conflict dynamics have arguably become more complex through comparative analysis, the studies in this issue support recent findings and critiques that "often missing... is a connection to the specific legacies of repressive policies and human rights violations" (Ramírez-Barat & Duthie 2017, 11). Discounting the possibility that educational structures, learning environments, and curricula might have contributed to conflict dynamics is a product of traditional assumptions that schools are inherently safe, accessible, and affirming spaces for all students. Operating within this paradigm limits educational responses to systemic injustice and conflates the distinct ways in which education interacts with human rights and legacies of rights violations. Here we summarize some of this research while drawing on conceptions of justice as they have been applied to educational reform, arguing for implementing a "justice sensitive" (Davies 2017 in this issue) approach to education that is transformative and distinctly attentive to past legacies of injustice as it aims for future transformation.

Inequitable access to schools has been identified as a driver of violent conflict; it is not surprising then that equitable access to schools in conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts has been correlated with increased enrolment, as well as positive academic and social outcomes (Burde 2014; Burde & Linden 2013). However, we also have abundant evidence that increased access to schools does not inevitably lead to peace or peacebuilding. Field-based studies (Bellino 2017; King 2014; Levinson 2001; Worden 2014) and rigorous reviews of education in conflict-affected settings (Burde et al. 2016; Paulson 2015) illustrate that the quality and nature of educational interactions, as well as access to schools, influence attitudes toward violence, injustice, and pluralism. Education is powerfully linked to root causes of conflict (Degu 2005, 129), and thus becomes a powerful vehicle and venue for addressing these root causes. But in the midst and aftermath of conflict, schools need to do more than open their doors to more children in order to contribute to societal goals such as conflict reduction—to say nothing of their potential contributions to a wider sense of historical or social justice within and beyond the classroom.

To these findings emerging from conflict-affected settings, we might add decades of research set in societies where legacies of injustice are further removed temporally from the present-day but nonetheless continue to shape contemporary power inequities. Reproduction theorists have long posited that schools reflect societal inequities while institutionalizing them. For historically oppressed groups, schools often signify spaces of physical, structural, and symbolic violence and are key institutions in the reproduction of societal injustices and inequities. Schools created by colonizers across Africa, the Americas, and elsewhere were designed to educate through structural exclusion as well as through cultural and linguistic assimilation (Bastos 2012; Greene 2017; Lawrence 2011; López 2014; Samoff & Carrol 2013; vom Hau 2017). Pointing to the incalculability of injustices perpetuated during apartheid, a South African lawyer asked, "How do you compensate for the results of Bantu education, a system designed to make African children inferior so that they are only trained to minister to the needs of the white man?" (cited in Minow 1998, 182). Schools in Australia, Canada, the U.S., and elsewhere systematically stripped indigenous peoples of their cultural, linguistic, and spiritual identities (e.g., Abdi 2012; Cairns & Roe 2003; Castagno & McKinley Jones Brayboy 2008). In a poignant statistic, Jeanette Soon-Ludes (2017) reminds us that the introduction of mass schooling in the Hawaiian Islands effectively rendered a literate population illiterate overnight. U.S. schools remain "sites of black suffering," perpetuated by policies of racial

segregation and desegregation (Dumas 2014) whose injuries are routinely unacknowledged in educational policy and practice. In these ways, education systems have institutionalised vast inequities, while also normalising them, or rendering them invisible.

Moreover, educational systems retain and reproduce legacies of inequity and exclusion, just as members of historically oppressed groups continue to experience them, accumulating injustice across generations. To acknowledge, let alone begin to compensate for, the legacy of systematically inducing shame and inferiority through the institutionalization of formal schooling, requires much more than access to those same structures of exclusion. Engaging with, and dismantling, legacies of systematic repression is precisely the work of transitional justice. It is the joint recognition and accountability to this historical dimension of injustice that we argue is relevant to discussions of education in all societies, particularly in the aftermath of systematic human rights violations. In this sense, we take a broad view of transitional justice that embraces conceptions of ‘historical justice,’ i.e., one oriented toward “long-term efforts at transformation that involve some element of social restructuring” (Arthur 2009, 362; also see Neumann & Thompson 2015). Legacies of historical injustice become less visible and thus more normalized as time passes, so that future-oriented reforms often become disarticulated from the historical processes that contributed to challenges embedded in the status quo (see Murphy 2017 in this issue). Reflecting on educational disparities in the U.S., Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) famously argued for a conceptual shift from “the achievement gap as a way of explaining and understanding the persistent inequality that exists (and has always existed) in our nation’s schools” (4) to “an education debt” accrued through historical, economic, socio-political, and moral injustices (5).

Victims and survivors of mass atrocities have placed high value on education for themselves, their families, and future generations. Yet in many cases, visions of education serving as a mechanism of repair and redress for historical wrongs become reduced to calls for expanded access to schools, physical reconstruction of school spaces, and the removal of negative content and practices. Reducing calls for educational justice to expanded access to schools, irrelevant of the nature of learning contexts, interactions, and curricula perpetuates the simplistic notion that education is an inherently positive and virtuous social good and that all citizens access this right equally. Political philosopher Nancy Fraser (2009) argues that justice depends on economic redistribution, social recognition, and political representation on a global scale. Adding to this, Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, and Smith (2015) build a framework for education’s contributions to peacebuilding, arguing for the relevance of a “fourth R” and thus making explicit what is implicitly diffused in Fraser’s framework: redistribution, recognition, representation, *and* reconciliation. Based on cross-national analyses in Lebanon, Nepal, and Sierra Leone, they theorize that education in post-conflict settings benefits when situated at the intersection of these “four R’s”; however in practice, efforts to redistribute educational opportunities are more often implemented than efforts to recognize, represent, and reconcile.

One of the paradigmatic tasks for education as a mechanism of transitional justice is to employ what Lynn Davies (this issue; also see Davies, In press) aptly calls a “dual gaze,” looking back to past abuses and ahead to the future prevention of their recurrence. Temporally and ideologically committed to past and present, transitional justice requires looking forward *and* backward—or perhaps looking to the future *through* the lens of the past. Maintaining this dual gaze demands that education in transitional justice contexts transcends traditional development goals such as access to schools and other basic social services, addressing legacies of conflict and division that reside within educational structures, contexts, and curricula. Another dialectic relevant here is

the need for restorative and transformative practices alongside efforts to affirm and uphold citizens' basic rights. Nancy Fraser (1997) distinguishes between affirmative and transformative approaches to injustice. While affirmative remedies are "aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them," transformative remedies are "aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes precisely by restructuring the underlying generative framework" (23). Studies in this special issue point to the ways that transitional justice measures tend to apply "affirmative remedies" to formal educational arrangements, leaving intact inequities that are structured into school systems, environments, and curricula. Positioning education as an avenue for "transformative remedies" requires attention to transitional justice as a lens into systemic reform and everyday practice.

Articles on transitional justice, education and the lens of the past

Lynn Davies' paper succinctly captures these tensions through her conception of "justice-sensitive education." After theorizing the dimensions of this approach, Davies applies this lens to educational reforms implemented in Sri Lanka, where she has been an integral actor in shaping the National Policy for Education for Social Cohesion and Peace. Her analysis points to the need to engage multiple mechanisms within education, encompassing reforms to structures, curricula, and institutional culture. Davies also points to preconditions for positive changes, which emerge within and outside of the educational sector, illustrating the complexity of educational institutions as they are positioned within societies undergoing transition.

The distinctions between affirmative and transformative practices are further examined through the lens of truth commissions in Julia Paulson and Michelle Bellino's paper. Their study compares the ways that twenty truth commissions have worked with education over time and across country contexts. They find a promising trend of increased educational engagement, indicating that education has become an arena of increased importance to the work of truth commissions and transitional justice processes. However, their analysis also points to the persistence of future-oriented initiatives that do not systematically interrogate education's potential contributions to conflict, injustice, or social division, and thus largely neglect opportunities to transform conflict legacies and contribute towards positive peace.

Transitional justice inside the classroom

This collection of papers highlights the continued importance of curricular attention to histories of injustice, peace, democracy, and human rights, while making active efforts to link state-level visions to the agency and everyday decision-making of teachers and students. Ultimately educational policies and standardized curricula depend on classroom teachers' interpretations of them, as well as their capacity and desire to enact, adapt, or resist them (Worden 2014). Some of the earliest and most foundational research and practical interventions aimed at the intersection of education and transitional justice have pointed to the need for teachers who have experienced violent conflict to first grapple with and understand these experiences, as well as to critically reflect on their roles in shaping or subverting these dynamics in their own classrooms (Cole & Murphy 2007; Murphy & Gallagher 2009; Weldon 2010a, 2010b). Yet despite the vital role that educators play in shaping school-based interactions, they remain undervalued stakeholders in peacebuilding and transitional justice processes (see Horner et al 2015).

Educators are complexly positioned as transitional justice actors, impacted by their personal

and professional identities and experiences. Teachers may have directly experienced, or participated in, conflict as individuals or as members of targeted groups. In a number of Latin American contexts, for example, teachers were persecuted for presumably advancing radical ideology aligned with insurgency movements. Though often these ‘radical’ ideas encompassed calls for equitable rights and participation for marginalized groups—principles later affirmed through peace negotiations—there is no doubt that teachers who returned to their classrooms thought cautiously about the dangers of raising their students’ critical consciousness. Many others left the profession and never returned (e.g. Sandoval 2004). In other contexts, teachers have become key agents of reconstruction during and after forced displacement, convening temporary schools during times of war and playing key roles in attempting to restore a “sense of normality” for families and individuals (Nicolai 2002, 25). Teachers who have survived periods of rights violations have also been exposed to ideologies that worked to legitimize social hierarchies or violent repression. Indeed, these norms likely shaped aspects of their own schooling.

In many peacebuilding contexts, these same teachers, who will have had complex and different experiences of conflict (including personal trauma) and variable senses of political agency and commitment, are expected to become peacebuilders. They are asked to do some or all of the following: support the psychosocial recovery and wellbeing of students, deliver human rights, citizenship, conflict resolution and peace education, and teach about the recent conflict (e.g. Horner et al. 2015), often in working conditions that are already difficult and within schooling systems that are constrained by lack of resources and the pressures of growing accountability (e.g. Morris 2016; Sobe 2014). In Colombia, state school teachers in the city of Bogotá regularly strike to draw attention to their poor compensation. In Kenya, teacher strikes routinely disrupt basic and tertiary education calendars. Remote, rural villages in Guatemala struggle to access state-approved resources, even though they are bound by the national curriculum. Some teachers question the burden of both imparting disciplinary knowledge and serving as a peacebuilder. In Northern Ireland, a student teacher reported that he wants to teach because he “loves history,” not because he is interested in “conflict resolution.” Just as we cannot pretend that teachers are unbiased, unaffected, and untraumatized survivors of conflict, we cannot separate teachers’ working conditions from these lived experiences.

Faced with this situation, educators and researchers alike might hide behind familiar excuses in explaining why teachers do not address difficult or contested subjects in the classroom, such as a lack of instructional time or resources. While we do not doubt that many teachers are overburdened and under resourced, these explanations might obscure more amorphous and/or emotionally complex reasons for why teachers avoid addressing difficult subjects, such as personal involvement or traumatic experiences that they have not yet resolved. In Northern Ireland, for example, how might a teacher with a raw emotional connection to the Troubles, such as an unresolved death of a loved one, teach about this difficult past? How can teachers facilitate dialogue about injustice when they are still experiencing the effects of their own trauma? Relatedly, how do teachers teach their students about peace, justice, and democracy when they have not experienced it or question its relevance to and possibilities within their society? These questions are rarely addressed in educational policy reform, despite their centrality in shaping teachers’ embrace of policy change and their roles as peacebuilders in classrooms.

Indeed, peacebuilding educational reforms are often nested within or implemented alongside wider neoliberal education policy reforms in evidence across the globe (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo and Smith 2015). These include policies such as increased standardized testing and teacher accountability

mechanisms, limiting teacher agency and autonomy in the classroom, and increased trends toward privatization and public-private partnerships to deliver schooling, thus shifting education from a public service to a private good. These global trends have significant consequences for imagining education as peacebuilding, and for conceptualizing the relationship between education and transitional justice, whose literatures tend to maintain the state a key actor and have largely yet to grapple with the uncertainties raised by a new set of actors governing education. What are the implications for transitional justice and education in a time of increased global neoliberal agendas? We encourage future research to consider how the tensions already present within transitional justice contexts play out or take on new resonance as neoliberal educational policy reforms expand globally.

Articles on transitional justice inside the classroom

In Northern Ireland, Elizabeth Anderson Worden and Alan Smith scrutinize teaching citizenship in the post-conflict context while questioning whether citizenship can be taught in isolation of discussion about a country's difficult past. They draw on interviews with teachers and curriculum specialists while reviewing a new citizenship education programme that de-emphasizes national identity in favour of human rights and global citizenship, asking to what extent education can promote the goals of transitional justice in the absence of a formal process. They find that organizational constraints within the education system, as well as educators' priorities, limit the potential of the new programme. Their analysis also points to teachers' attitudes and concerns, such as teachers' underestimation of the importance of teaching political literacy and bias towards certain sectors of society, which further shape and influence how official curriculum is transmitted. In light of encouraging transitional justice and thick democracy through education, the Northern Ireland case asks us to consider the extent to which this can be accomplished through a curriculum that is compromised by constraints.

Susan Shepler and James Williams' ethnographic research in Sierra Leone and Liberia presents two contrasting cases. While Sierra Leone engaged in a substantial transitional justice process, Liberia did not. Meanwhile, in both settings, addressing the violent past has not been funneled into curriculum or formal school-based interactions from above or below. Authors find that teachers in both contexts do not view schools as viable or productive sites for conversations about past conflict. Rather, school interactions, often perceived as 'outside' impositions, are oriented around rigorous preparation for national exams, leaving little time for conversations presumed by some to be essential to peacebuilding. However, the physical and symbolic spaces of schools are central to community-based efforts to preserve oral histories of conflict through intergenerational dialogue. This study encourages reflection on the extent to which transitional justice initiatives are imposed from external, largely Western perspectives, and encourages us to actively explore, leverage, and interact with culturally specific ways communities decide to commemorate difficult pasts.

Gail Weldon and Felisa Tibbitts document a promising case study of a transnational, partnership in post-apartheid South Africa, called Facing the Past, and position this teacher training initiative against the wider failure to prepare history teachers for a their new role as peacebuilders after apartheid. The authors illustrate educators' central role in transitional justice processes, particularly as they come to reflect on their own positionality and the choices they have made as citizens living during repressive regimes. They argue that when teachers are given the opportunity to explore the legacies of conflict amongst themselves and in diverse communities, they are then able to facilitate 'micro processes of transitional justice' in their classrooms. Their study points to the enormous potential for teacher preparation, training, and learning opportunities in transitional

justice contexts, identifying practices and partnerships that, over time and with great effort, have facilitated ongoing support, inquiry, and reflection across teacher learning communities.

Widening our lens: transitional justice as education writ large

The focus on education as a deliberate action and as taking place in bounded or even temporal spaces overlooks the profound educative role that a transitional justice process plays in reshaping a social order writ large and across generations. Historians of education have debated the parameters of education, arguing, on the one hand that education encompasses “the entire process by which a culture transmits itself over time” (Baylin in Lawrence 2011, 172) or, on the other, that education requires intentionality.² These conceptions of education resonate with theories of culture as learned and practiced, rather than innate or fixed (Goodenough 1971; McDermott & Varenne 2004); as well as theories of learning as situated (Lave & Wenger 1992). These constructs also give us a lens through which to consider the degree and intentionality with which transitional justice, as a process and as a context for societal change, is educative *writ large* and to what effect(s).

To better understand the possibilities for transitional justice to contribute towards sustainable peace and thick democracy, we propose widening our lens to consider the ways in which the educative aspects of transitional justice processes can (re)shape individual subjectivity, community practices, and societal commitments to and conceptions of peace and justice in ways that have multigenerational impact. Transitional justice presents opportunities for citizens to learn (and in some cases appropriate, adapt, and resist) a new language in which to talk about historical justice and injustice, to recognize their participation and positionality in these events, and in some cases how to ask for forgiveness, amnesty, acknowledgement, or resources from local, national, and international communities. In some cases, these openings are reductive and limiting, co-opted by elites and state institutions, demonstrating the salience of the critiques made by critical transitional justice scholars. In other cases, transitional justice creates authentic opportunities to challenge embedded assumptions about social hierarchies and divisions, leading to transformative learning. To be clear, we do not believe that the enormous costs of mass violence are worthy trade-offs for subsequent learning. Our aim in this section is to highlight that attention to the wider processes of social learning that transitional justice enables (or thwarts) can illuminate the degree to which transitional justice might contribute towards goals like thick democracy and positive peace.

Teaching and learning through transitional justice is not—as we might hope—inevitably emancipatory. At times transitional justice has led to coercive practices, assigning fixed roles to identity groups and reifying new national narratives and scripts as indisputable historical truths. For example, Thiedon (2010) argues that truth commissions construct a dichotomy of victims and perpetrators and “develop victim typologies...[that] establish a discursive space and subject positions from which people speak” (100). These categories may or may not reflect an individual’s feelings about the past, and risk invoking silence if an individual’s narrative challenges socially accepted positions. From her ethnographic work on the Peruvian Truth Commission Thiedon concludes, “in trying the right to redress to an individual’s ‘innocence,’ the Peruvian state distorted the content and practice of citizenship” (109).

Similarly, legacies of authoritarianism are taught and learned inter-generationally—whether

² See Lawrence 2011 pp. 172-173 for an overview of the debate between American historians Bernard Bailyn, Richard Storr, and Lawrence Cremin on the parameters of education.

these lessons are explicitly displayed or more implicitly embodied in social interactions writ large. Amidst widespread postwar violence and repression of social movements in Guatemala, youth navigate legacies of authoritarianism alongside promises of democratic freedoms. In learning the rules and risks of civic participation, they make informed decisions about when collective action will be safe, feasible, and productive. In this sense, young people demonstrate the capacity to assert their agency under constrained conditions, yet their learning requires an understanding of the physical and social risks one endures in taking action alongside the social benefits of silence and inaction (Bellino 2015, 2017). What do we make of these complex displays of civic learning? In some ways these youth conform to the coercive goals and roles assigned to them; in other ways, they display creative agency aimed at adapting to extreme conditions. In another example, Shepler (2005) reveals how former child soldiers in Sierra Leone learned to co-opt the language and victim-centred lens of western aid workers in order to frame their war experiences in ways that were socially acceptable to an international audience. In turn, the former child soldiers were able to access benefits from international programs by employing the “right” language. This display of learning involves youths’ appropriation of a socially acceptable framework assigned to them by outsiders, thus maintaining unequal power dynamics and prioritizing Western legitimacy. However, the ways that these young people strategically deploy this discourse to further their own needs also demonstrates their agency and creativity, and in this sense illustrates productive learning.

Articles on transitional justice as education writ large

More than twenty years after Rwanda’s genocide, Denise Bentrovato explores the beliefs and attitudes of young people impacted by post-genocide educational policies of a singular narrative and the silencing of ethnic differences. Through surveys with 1000 young people ages 12-25, Bentrovato asks whether young people believe, understand, and critique narratives of ethnic homogeneity and truths that are at once dogmatic and contradictory. Despite the politically sensitive nature of these discussions some young people maintain “clandestine counter-narratives.” In other cases, diverse interpretations are revealed through young people’s narrative efforts to pacify, polarize, racialize, and homogenize violent aggression and victimization, revealing divisions within Rwanda’s “regime of truth.”

Andrei Gómez Suarez’s paper presents the concept of peace process pedagogy as a way to intentionally shape wider social learning during transitional justice. Gómez Suarez’s study takes us into the context of Colombia’s ongoing transitional justice process and the challenges of community mobilization set against powerful discourses generated by state and non-state actors. Drawing from experiences working across secondary, tertiary, and community contexts, Gómez Suarez documents civil society’s emotional entanglements with public discourse. Set in a “post-truth era,” peace “spoilers” are equipped with new tools to tap into longstanding fears and anxieties in their efforts to derail peace processes. Gómez Suarez identifies guiding principles and strategies that aim to inform and transform “anti-peace mindsets” through critical peace pedagogy.

Closing Thoughts

We finalise this special issue in a week during which thirty-one migrants drowned off the coast of Libya, the majority of them toddlers; seven children and fifteen others were killed in Manchester by a suicide bomber while attending a pop concert and sixty-eight children were killed when buses carrying evacuees from the towns outside Aleppo in Syria were bombed. Conflict is internationalized and global in its reach. Nearly 40 million people have been displaced and internal

conflict, division, and borders are finding new and more forceful ways to exclude within and across mature democracies. Though we do not discount the very real distinctions between societies emerging from systematic violence and repressive governance and those that have had more recent and relatively privileged interactions with conflict and autocracy (notwithstanding legacies of historical injustice that have continued to target minoritized groups), we wish to emphasize that the tensions, challenges, opportunities, and practices highlighted in these pages are not confined to those spaces and places designated “conflict-affected” or “post-conflict.” Moreover, these labels are often contested when they are—and are not—applied (e.g., Bellino 2015; Rodríguez-Gómez 2017). The opportunity to join education and justice endeavours has relevance across societies wrestling with historical legacies—which, in our view, implicates all societies.

The contexts from which we write, the US and the UK, are in many ways falling short, or not taking full advantage, of opportunities to systematically address historical injustice in order to work toward thick democracy. Nonetheless, there are instances where we see transitional justice making in-roads in productive ways. There are a number of recent efforts underway in North America and Western Europe aimed at acknowledging and redressing (albeit in delayed and partial ways) legacies of colonialization, slavery, and forced encampment. In 1988, the Canadian federal government issued an official apology and monetary reparations to the 22,000 Japanese Canadians who were forcibly separated from families and interned in camps during World War II. In 2008, the Canadian government issued another official apology acknowledging the country’s history of indigenous residential schooling, and subsequently created a truth commission to rigorously investigate, document, and disseminate this history. In the aftermath of the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, a flashpoint in the U.S. Black Lives Matter movement, 16 community leaders formed the ‘Ferguson Commission,’ to investigate the social and economic conditions that resulted in Brown’s death, and to propose solutions. Several U.S. universities—from elite institutions in New England to small southern liberal arts colleges—have undergone symbolic reparations and truth-seeking by interrogating their own ties to slavery. A group of twenty-five US universities have founded the Universities Studying Slavery group, which aims to “address both historical and contemporary issues dealing with race and inequality in higher education and in university communities as well as the complicated legacies of slavery in modern American society.”³ In Oxford, students inspired by the ‘Rhodes must fall’ movement in South Africa campaigned for a statue of colonialist Cecil Rhodes to be removed from the University’s Oriel College, for a wider acknowledgement of the university’s colonial links, and for the decolonization of the university curriculum. Unlike its US counterparts, Oxford did not take up students’ call for what might be called a transitional justice process within the university – Rhodes’ statue remains (Guardian 2016). Though these efforts to acknowledge historical injustice so many years after rights violations have taken place are largely ad hoc, they demonstrate the ways that transitional justice tools have been adapted, with varying degrees of formality, success, and legitimacy to address distinct legacies of historical injustice in diverse contexts—in some cases with explicit educational dimensions and goals. They also demonstrate the significant and vibrant role that civil society actors can play when implementing transitional justice “from below.”

Regardless of what measures states undergo at the macro level, teachers in schools confront questions and tensions that emerge from historical injustice and, where relevant, they are also forced to grapple with the transitional justice processes that have aimed to redress these injustices (e.g.,

³ For more, see <http://slavery.virginia.edu/universities-studying-slavery/>

Suárez Gomez, 2017 this issue). Whether or not societies opt to engage in transitional justice through the embrace of formal mechanisms, all societies wrestle with historical injustices, whose consequences and legacies enter, and all too often fundamentally shape, classrooms and communities. Despite scholarly resistance to joining transitional justice with broader conceptions of 'historical justice' (Arthur 2009), we argue that schools as civic institutions cannot simply opt out of these discussions.

Looking across transitional justice contexts, we might ask whether formal mechanisms of redress at the state level better equip teachers with the resources and tools to facilitate difficult conversations with students. Do these efforts reshape civic culture in meaningful ways, offering teachers and students new language, conceptions of justice, moral commitments, and forms of engagement? Do transitional justice mechanisms make visible the perverse ways that education might have contributed to conflict dynamics, thus creating opportunities for structural and systemic reform? Or do these mechanisms perhaps open up later opportunities, so that "what [initially] seems like a failure...may pave the way for later success" (Worden 2014, 117)?

On the whole, the studies in this special issue demonstrate increased recognition of the potential for education as a mechanism of transitional justice, while recognizing the educative potential of transitional moments. Though authors critique the timing, nature, and in some cases the sincerity of these engagements, the increased awareness of education as a potential lever of change opens the door for more coordinated responses. Indeed, this is a time for our own global learning to lead toward better advocacy and more informed policy responses. For transitional justice actors, this is a reminder of the critical role that educators and education as a sector play in transforming civil society, and an invitation to collaborate more directly with educational stakeholders in shaping policies that will impact their work. For educators, this is an invitation to loosen the boundaries around what we conceive as educative practices, to widen our gaze to everyday contexts where teaching and learning take place, and in which schools and the lives of the communities they serve are embedded. With this Special Issue, we have argued for and explored the possibilities of transitional justice and education to work together towards thick democracy and positive peace. This work acknowledges the inequitable power dynamics that can shape these interactions at various scales and yet searches for opportunities for transitional justice and education to disrupt them and open space for transformative learning and societal transformation writ large. The issue closes with reflections from two practitioners working at the intersections of transitional justice and education, Karen Murphy, International Director of the Facing History and Ourselves, and Tricia Logan, Community Engagement and Outreach Officer for Canada's National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. Their reflections make clear both the scope and the importance of the challenge and the energy with which educators, policymakers and young people themselves are approaching the work of transforming historical injustice.

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